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SIPDIS
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MESSAGE REJECTED - CONTAINS UNRECOGNIZED ORIGINATOR
-- ERRORED MESSAGE FOLLOWS --
PAAUZYUW RUEHPOD0146 1241531-UUUU--RHMCSSU.
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FM AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RUEHPOD/AMEMBASSY PODGORICA
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PODGORICA 000146

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: PREL MARR PGOV MW
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT VUJANOVIC'S U.S. VISIT SHADOWED BY CONTROVERSY
OVER DEFENSE AGREEMENTS

PODGORICA 00000146 001.3 OF 002

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶11. (U) SUMMARY: PRESIDENT VUJANOVIC'S MAY 1-4 VISIT TO THE UNITED STATES, HIS FIRST SINCE MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE LAST JUNE, GOT WIDE MEDIA COVERAGE AND GENERALLY POSITIVE REACTIONS. VUJANOVIC'S MEETINGS WITH VP CHENEY AND SECRETARY WERE COVERED FACTUALLY. HOWEVER, THE SIGNATURE OF THE STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT (SOFA) AND THE EXCHANGE OF DIPLOMATIC NOTES IN RESPECT OF ARTICLE 98 OF THE ROME STATUTE (INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT - ICC) ATTRACTED SHARP CRITICISM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION. END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT'S MEETINGS WITH SENIOR USG OFFICIALS

¶12. (U) PRESIDENT VUJANOVIC VISITED WASHINGTON, D.C. MAY 1-4, HIS FIRST VISIT SINCE MONTENEGRIN INDEPENDENCE LAST JUNE. HIS MEETINGS GOT EXTENSIVE LOCAL MEDIA COVERAGE, PARTICULARLY THE SIGNING OF THE STATUS OF FORCES AGREEMENT (SOFA) WITH SECRETARY RICE, AND HIS MEETING WITH VICE PRESIDENT CHENEY. COVERAGE OF THE MEETINGS THEMSELVES WAS LARGELY FACTUAL IN TONE. LESS COVERAGE WAS GIVEN TO VUJANOVIC'S MEETING WITH SECRETARY GATES, AND TO HIS TRIP TO MONTENEGRO'S PARTNER IN DOD'S STATE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM, THE STATE OF MAINE, WHERE HE WAS RECEIVED BY THE GOVERNOR AND THE HEAD OF THE STATE NATIONAL GUARD.

CONTROVERSY OVER SOFA, ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT

13. (U) THE PARLIAMENTARY OPPOSITION CRITICIZED THE SOFA, AND PARTICULARLY OBJECTED TO THE APRIL 19 USG-GOM "ARTICLE 98" AGREEMENT ON THE ROME STATUTE (INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT - ICC). THE OPPOSITION CLAIMED THAT BOTH AGREEMENTS WERE NOT VALID WITHOUT PARLIAMENTARY RATIFICATION - A POSITION REJECTED PUBLICLY (AND PRIVATELY) BY THE MFA AND GOM. THE SERBIAN LIST (THE LARGEST SINGLE PARLIAMENTARY GROUP IN OPPOSITION) HAS CALLED FOR PRESIDENT'S VUJANOVIC'S RESIGNATION, FOR SIGNING THE SOFA. COMMENT: THE OPPOSITION FREQUENTLY CALLS FOR THE RESIGNATION OF SENIOR GOM OFFICIALS, AS A RHETORICAL DEVICE. END COMMENT.

14. (SBU) ASSISTANT FOREIGN MINISTER DRAGANA RADULOVIC TOLD POLOFF MAY 4, THAT THE PUBLIC AND OPPOSITION REACTION TO THE SOFA AND ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT WAS NOT UNANTICIPATED, ALTHOUGH THE TIMING WAS. RADULOVIC NOTED THAT EARLIER IN THE WEEK SHE WAS BUSY CLARIFYING THE SCOPE AND NATURE OF THE SOFA. AS TO THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT, SHE SAID THE MFA AND GOM CONSCIOUSLY TOOK INTO ACCOUNT THAT SOONER OR LATER THE AGREEMENT WOULD BE PUBLICIZED, AND THAT THE EU HAS EXPRESSED ITS DISLIKE FOR SUCH AGREEMENTS TO PROSPECTIVE MEMBERS. RADULOVIC CONTINUED THAT NEVERTHELESS, THE GOM AND MFA CONSCIOUSLY PLACED THE VALUE OF A STRONG RELATIONSHIP, INCLUDING ON DEFENSE MATTERS, WITH THE USG AHEAD OF "MISCHIVIOUS ATTACKS" FROM THE PRESS AND OPPOSITION. SHE OBSERVED THAT NO ONE HERE IS ATTACKING THE USG, JUST THE GOM, AND THEY CAN LIVE WITH THAT. IN RESPONSE TO ACCUSATIONS THAT THE GOM WAS KEEPING THE AGREEMENTS "SECRET", THE GOM HAS RECENTLY POSTED THE SOFA AND THE ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENTS ON THE GOM WEBSITE (WWW.VLADA.CG.YU).

COMMENT

15. (SBU) THE CONTRETEMPS POINTS UP THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTINUING PREDELECTION FOR DECISIONS TAKEN BY A CLOSED CIRCLE WITH LITTLE REFERENCE TO THE PARLIAMENT. POST CONSIDERED PRESS BACKGROUNDER TO TRY AND COUNTER SOME OF THE MORE OUTRAGEOUS CHARGES--SOFA WILL PERMIT AMERICANS TO ESTABLISH BASES, BUT REFRAINED AS BACKGROUND RULES ARE POORLY UNDERSTOOD AND EMBASSY WOULD HAVE BECOME THE STORY.CHARGE SPOKE WITH THE SOMEWHAT BLEAGURED

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SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE MFA ON MAY 4 AND GIVEN THE CONTINUING

SIPDIS
SWIRL WILL TALK WITH SELECTED JOURNALISTS. POST WILL TAKE THE OPPORTUNITY OF POLOFF'S PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MAY 8 MEETING WITH THE PARLIAMENT'S DEFENSE AND SECURITY OVERSIGHT BOARD TO TALK ABOUT THE AGREEMENTS AND HOW THEY ARE ESSENTIAL IF THE US IS TO ASSIST MONTENEGRO IN ITS DEFENSE REFORM. POST NOTES THAT THE BOARD, AT THE INVITATION OF NATO, WILL VISIT BRUSSELS AT THE END OF NEXT WEEK FOR TWO DAYS OF ORIENTATION MEETINGS WITH NATO. POST SHARES THE GOM EXPECTATION THAT THE CONTROVERSY OVER THE ARTICLE 98 AGREEMENT WILL FADE , REPLACED BY THE NEXT "SCANDAL OF THE WEEK." END COMMENT.

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